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Summary Report:



1987 Forum on Disabled Employment Issues

..... prepared by

Human Resources Development Institute
AFL-CIO
P.O. Box 1176
Helena, Montana 59624

Governor's Committee on Employment
of People with Disabilities
Room 130, Mitchell Building
Helena, Montana 59620

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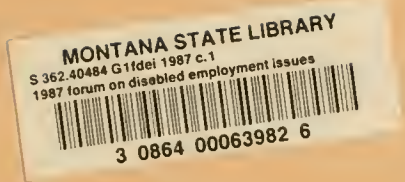


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FORUM ON DISABLED EMPLOYMENT ISSUES
SEPTEMBER 24, 1987
GRANTREE MOTOR INN, BOZEMAN, MONTANA

INTRODUCTION

In May of 1987, the Governor's Committee on Employment of the Disabled (GCED) was asked by the Human Resources Development Institute (HRDI), AFL-CIO, if it would cosponsor a conference on employment of the disabled in Montana. HRDI indicated its need for a conference to strengthen cooperation with other agencies and rehabilitative service providers; and to affirm organized labor's strong commitment to establish better access to employment for individuals with disabilities.

The Governor's committee was receptive to HRDI's request to cosponsor a conference. The committee felt it needed to expand its efforts in identifying the employment needs of the disabled and in recommending action based on identified problem areas. Specifically, Executive Order 30-81, under which the committee operated, stated that the committee "shall . . . aid in the identification of problem areas, target these areas for action, and provide a forum for the exchange of information." A statewide conference on disabled employment issues seemed an ideal way to fulfill this major purpose of the committee.

While statewide conferences concerning disabled employment issues had been held before, they had either been part of conferences including other disabled issues, or they had been specific to particular programs or disabilities. To the sponsors' knowledge, a statewide conference which focused on employment issues only and included all disabilities had never been held before in Montana. There was, therefore, no "blueprint" for the proposed conference.

To conference planners it seemed the best possible format would be a "forum" in which all groups involved in disabled employment would be able to present their particular perspective. The purposes of the forum were identified as:

1. To bring together the three major groups involved in employment of the disabled (disabled advocacy groups, service providers and employers) to increase mutual understanding of the concerns and needs of each group.
2. To provide to all those attending an awareness of the current status of disabled employment in Montana and of anticipated changes in programs and legislation.
3. To provide each group, and all those attending the forum, the opportunity to express their concerns, identify critical issues, and make recommendations.
4. To serve as the basis for a report which could be used by decision makers in targeting specific action for improving employment opportunities for the disabled of Montana.

The following report summarizes the opinions, ideas, needs, and recommendations which emerged from the general session and interactive panel sessions. It also examines the success of the forum in achieving its purposes with recommendations for future conferences.

FORUM AGENDA

OPENING REMARKS AND INTRODUCTION OF KEYNOTE SPEAKER

Blair Ricks, Chair, Governor's Committee on Employment of the Disabled

KEYNOTE ADDRESS "A NATIONAL PERSPECTIVE"

Jay Rochlin, President's Committee on Employment of the Handicapped, Washington, D.C.

GENERAL SESSION

"THE DISABLED'S PERSPECTIVE"

Kathy Kelker, Parents, Let's Unite for Kids; Keith McCarty, Development Disabilities Planning and Advisory Council; Rich Brown, Disabled American Veterans; Kathy Collins, Montana Independent Living Council; Gordon Hage, Governor's Committee on Employment of the Disabled

"THE SERVICE PROVIDERS' PERSPECTIVE"

Jim Whealon, Office of Public Instruction; Peg Hartman, Department of Labor and Industry; Gail Gray, Department of Social and Rehabilitation Services; Tony Suazo, AFL-CIO Human Resources Development Institute

"THE EMPLOYERS' PERSPECTIVE"

Blair Ricks, Montana Power Company; David Tolan, Safeway Stores, Inc.; Jim Murry, Montana State AFL-CIO

PANEL SESSIONS

ADVOCACY GROUP PANEL

Moderator, Gordon Hage, Department of Justice; Edward VanTighem, Montana Association for the Deaf; Rick James, Montana Association for the Blind; Bob Liston, Wheelchairs, Crutches and People

SERVICE PROVIDER PANEL

Moderator, Dan Newman, AFL-CIO Human Resources Development Institute; Bob Maffit, Rehabilitative Services Division; Jim Whealon, Office of Public Instruction; William Palmer, Workers' Compensation Division

EMPLOYER PANEL

Moderator, Blair Ricks, Montana Power Company; Gary Willis, Department of State Lands; Paul Gregory, Deer Lodge National Forest

KEYNOTE SPEECH

JAY ROCHLIN, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR
PRESIDENT'S COMMITTEE ON EMPLOYMENT OF THE HANDICAPPED

Mr. Rochlin emphasized that the President's Committee on Employment of the Handicapped is committed to working closely with all states' Governor's Committees because they are the PCEH's connection with the grassroots. "In Washington it is easy to lose touch with the real issues that face disabled persons and service providers. Without input from the grassroots, and from state gatherings like this forum, the President's Committee would be unable to direct its efforts towards problems as identified by people who face them on a daily basis."

Mr. Rochlin noted that he had been invited to speak to disabled employment issues from a national perspective. The following are highlights from his presentation.

Changes in the job market are benefiting the disabled.

The competition for existing jobs is declining. The Bureau of Labor Statistics projects that between now and 1995 there will be a 25% growth in the number of jobs nationally. There is a dramatic decrease in the number of people entering the labor market. Workers between the ages of 16 and 24 declined by 3.1 million since 1980. There are now more persons over the age of 65 than there are teenagers. Unemployment rates in some urban areas such as the Northeast are between two to four percent. As the number of jobs increase and the labor force shrinks, the disabled will face less competition for quality employment.

This trend has already benefited the disabled. Many service companies such as McDonald's Restaurants have countered the labor shortage and high turnover rates through special disabled employment programs. McDonald's management has emphasized that their hiring the disabled has not been done out of sympathy, but because it is good for their business.

Increases in technology are benefiting the disabled

The United States is moving from the "Industrial Age" to the "Information Age." This trend is beneficial in two ways. Millions of jobs are being created which can be performed by the severely physically disabled. Quadriplegics are now gainfully employed as computer programmers with the assistance of voice activated computers. Technology is also producing rapid advances in adaptive and assistive devices for all types of disabilities.

Review of Harris Polls of the Disabled and Employers

The 1985 Harris Poll of disabled persons estimated that two-thirds of disabled persons ages 16 to 64 are unemployed. Of those unemployed, 66%, or 8.2 million, disabled individuals want to go to work. Mr. Rochlin noted that the unemployment rate for the disabled is "a national disgrace," and that it should be a top priority of American society to bring these 8.2 million into the work force.

A second Harris poll of employers showed that the disabled: rated high on job performance, were willing to work harder than the non-disabled, were no more

expensive to employ than non-disabled, and were no harder to supervise than the non-disabled. The poll also showed that these positive ratings have not translated into wide-spread hiring of the disabled. Identified barriers to increased employment of the disabled were: employment discrimination, a low awareness by managers of the employment needs of the disabled, and a shortage of qualified disabled applicants.

Other studies point out the pressing need for progress in employing the disabled. One study showed that 8% of America's gross national product is used in subsidizing the disabled. America cannot afford to pay people not to work when they want to work. The disabled can be taxpayers instead of tax-users.

The disabled are seeking economic freedom -- they do not want to be economically dependent. Employment is at the top of the needs of the disabled. Better housing, increased socialization, higher self-esteem and respect of peers all result from being employed.

Employment of the disabled should be one of America's top priorities. On the national and local levels we need to forge effective partnerships of educators, service providers and employers to solve the problems that keep the disabled from becoming a viable, productive part of America's workforce.

EXCERPTS FROM GENERAL SESSION PRESENTATIONS

During the general session, presentations were made by individuals representing advocacy groups, service providers and employers. Each speaker was asked to make a 10-minute presentation to include a description of their organization/business and its purpose. They were also asked to assess the current status of disabled employment in Montana and make recommendations for improving employment opportunities for the disabled.

The following are excerpts from presentations given during the general session.

THE DISABLED'S PERSPECTIVE

KATHY KELKER, PROJECT DIRECTOR
PARENTS, LET'S UNITE FOR KIDS

Kathy said that besides providing support and information to parents of disabled children, PLUK works as an advocate for those parents and children.

At the top of PLUK's priority list is the question of work, as an essential for young people. She said that in many cases, education provided to disabled children while in school must go through a "major revolution." It is essential that parents plan very early for their children and not assume that the schools will have automatically trained them for work by the time they reach 18, because we know that's not the case, she said.

These children need greater social integration to develop the social skills necessary to get along in the workplace, Kelker stated.

PLUK also advocates vocational training. Under Montana's special education law, vocational goals must be considered when disabled children enter secondary school. Kathy noted that PLUK is trying to educate parents so they'll know what to ask for when plans are being made at school.

Kathy noted that supported work, a fairly new concept, involves helping those individuals who have a severe disability to work in competitive employment by providing the necessary assistance for their training on the job. PLUK strongly favored that effort, and lobbied the legislature for funding.

In conclusion, Kathy stated that PLUK is very concerned about interagency cooperation. At a time when funding for human resource programs are scarce, we can't allow a duplication of services.

KEITH MCCARTY, PROJECT DIRECTOR
MONTANA EMPLOYMENT PROJECT FOR PERSONS WITH
DEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITIES

Keith stated, "With supported employment, job readiness is not a requirement for work. Instead, the model assumes that necessary job skills can be learned at the job site. Supported employment is a type of work, not a method of preparation. Persons with disabilities are employed in the same settings as persons who are not disabled. The jobs are real ones, located in the competitive marketplace and paying prevailing wages and benefits. To assist the worker in this integrated environment, professional staff provide on-site training and a full range of support services," he continued.

"Montana's experiences with supported employment have been excellent. Approximately 200 persons -- many with severe disabilities -- currently hold jobs in the private sector," Keith noted. "Reports from employers, families and key community residents are consistently favorable. Employees with disabilities have become taxpayers rather than exclusively tax-consumers. Productivity has replaced inactivity. Employers have a new labor pool from which to draw many potentially talented workers."

Keith concluded by recommending the following legislative action:

-- Increased appropriations to SRS (vocational rehabilitation/developmental disabilities) for development and maintenance of vocational placement programs.

-- Endorsement of vocation rehabilitation/developmental disabilities policies and practices which promote internal program re-allocation ("conversion") among sheltered workshops and work activity centers.

-- Endorsement of the whole direction of delivering non-facility-based vocational and support services.

RICH BROWN, PAST COMMANDER
MONTANA DISABLED AMERICAN VETERANS

Rich stated, "With all the federal programs and community assistance provided, one might believe that there are no veteran employment problems. In Montana, with the sixth highest state per capita number of veterans, you can imagine full employment for our veterans, particularly those who are disabled. However, just the opposite is true. A Veterans Administration survey, completed in 1985, showed that Montana ranked highest in unemployed for all veterans categories.

"On December 20, 1988, 96% of all Montana veterans will be without a preference, including 56% of our disabled veterans. This is the intended purpose of Veterans and Handicapped Persons' Public Employment Preference Act passed in 1983," Rich said.

"Pursuant to the provisions of this act, approximately 50% of 'public jobs' are exempted and not required to conform. The other 50% of the employers covered under the act, are in my personal opinion, also exempt because there is no remedy for the disabled veteran or handicapped person whose rights were violated.

"Department of Administration statistics indicate the veterans are, based on population statistics, receiving a fair share of these jobs within state government. However, these statistics do not differentiate between the veteran and the disabled veteran."

Rich stated, "Employment of the veteran and particularly the disabled veteran will again become a major issue of the next legislative session. In the interim period, the disabled veteran and handicapped person must rely solely on 'affirmative action' or federal protective legislation."

He also continued, "The weakness of the 1983 Handicapped Persons and Veterans Preference Act is a result of the two affected groups' inability to agree and cooperate toward improved legislation. Having lobbied this legislation for the last five years, I have yet to see a joint effort expressed to the legislature.

"The foundation is in place under current law to insure all persons in Montana receive equal job opportunities. The entire governmental system of executive, legislative and judicial branches are waiting for us -- the disabled persons -- to move forward. We have not responded," Rich concluded.

KATHY COLLINS, PRESIDENT
INDEPENDENT LIVING ADVISORY COUNCIL

Kathy estimated that 60-80% of the Montana's severely disabled are unemployed. "Our state's economic base depends on agriculture, government, and wood products. Such industries gravely limit options to disabled employment, as does our state's labor surplus. Montana also harbors a 'take care of our own' attitude which is common in rural areas, and compounds unemployment problems among the severely disabled population.

"The current status of disabled employment in Montana is bleak, and vast improvement would depend on a total restructuring of our economic base."

She said in working with the severely disabled that, "first, the prospective disabled employees MUST have a positive attitude. Although it's difficult to instill, a disabled person's positive attitude may be the single most important factor toward employment.

"Secondly, essential support services must be provided to gain and maintain employment for the severely physically disabled. Reliable personal care, supportive domestic services, and adequate transportation are necessities, not luxuries.

"Third, disincentives to employment for the severely physically disabled must be removed. Fourth, our state needs more independent living centers. Two centers cannot completely serve a state as vast as ours.

"Lastly, mutually unbiased attitudes between the disabled and the employers must be created. We learn by doing, and when experimental relationships are developed, both sides can actively interact in the workplace."

GORDON HAGE, MEMBER
GOVERNOR'S COMMITTEE ON EMPLOYMENT OF THE DISABLED

Gordon Hage spoke on the responsibilities of the Governor's Committee on Employment of the Disabled. He stressed that the committee does not provide direct services to disabled individuals, but acts as a clearinghouse for information and works with agencies or organizations that provide direct services. Gordon stressed the committee's role in acknowledging employers who make a special effort on behalf of disabled workers through the committee's awards program.

He stated that Montana needs a better information network to keep disabled individuals and groups updated on various legislation which affect the disabled. This would serve as a lobby effort for action on pending or proposed legislation, and ultimately serve the disabled by giving them a stronger voice in their own destiny.

The governor's committee sees a need for greater awareness in education of employers so they can more effectively utilize the disabled worker -- not out of sympathy or charity -- but out of the recognition of their abilities as a person. A better education and awareness program for prospective employers of disabled individuals is necessary if we are to develop successful employment opportunities that will allow independence for Montana's disabled citizens, Hage concluded.

THE SERVICE PROVIDERS' PERSPECTIVE

JIM WHEALON, EQUAL OPPORTUNITY COORDINATOR
MONTANA OFFICE OF PUBLIC INSTRUCTION

Jim said he believed there are current problems that inhibit a greater service to Montana's handicapped population.

"First, is that Montana does not have an accurate identification of our state's handicapped population. I suspect that there is a larger portion of our population handicapped than we currently know. What is needed is more accurate reporting through an advocacy network to clearly identify the total population.

"Second, there is reason to express a concern for better coordination of services available to the population both within and between state agencies."

Finally, he suggested that there is a need to develop a comprehensive system that will track the benefits provided by the service systems for individuals.

Jim concluded by recognizing the fact that a great number of Montana's employers are increasingly becoming aware of the need for and benefits of hiring the handicapped. Through the forum of this conference, he viewed the direction as positive and assured those attending the conference that the educational system will continue to pursue quality services in the coordination model that will ultimately assist all handicapped individuals of the state.

PEG HARTMAN, COMMISSIONER
MONTANA DEPARTMENT OF LABOR AND INDUSTRY

The Commissioner began by saying, "The current status of employment of the disabled in this state is strongly related to employment as a whole, and employment as a whole is most generally a national issue.

"We need a national willingness to invest not only in the stock market and new technology, but in our human capital as well. This scenario is absolutely necessary because the workforce is changing dramatically. Low skill jobs are declining from nine percent to four percent in the next fifteen years. Workers now change occupations more frequently. Workers are growing older. There are fewer new entrants into the labor force - in the next ten years white, non-handicapped males will make up only 15 percent of new entrants.

"For companies that have previously hired mostly young white men, the years ahead will require major changes. Organizations from the military services to the trucking industry will be forced to look beyond their traditional sources of personnel. For well-qualified minorities, women and disabled, the opportunities will be unusually great. High-skill jobs will make up over 40 percent of jobs fifteen years from now.

"The implications for us all, and especially for service providers, are obvious and compelling. We must start immediately in developing employment and training

programs that allow for high educational levels for our workforce, barrier-free services, quality medical care for the 35 million Americans with no health insurance, regulate industrial work performed at home to provide safe work environments and maintain standards of child labor, minimum wage and overtime, and pursue pay equity to prevent economic ghettoizing of women, minorities and the disabled," Hartman concluded.

GAIL GRAY, DIRECTOR
MONTANA DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL AND REHABILITATION SERVICES

Gail reported that SRS, in compliance with the 1986 amendments to the Rehabilitation Act, conducted a survey to attempt to determine the most important needs for people with disabilities in the state. Among all recipients, the six most important concerns in rank order were: 1. The opportunity to receive the specialized rehabilitation necessary. 2. Community members' understanding of the needs of residents with disabilities. 3. The availability of adequate vocational training. 4. The adequacy of employment opportunities. 5. The accessibility of stores. 6. The availability of financial assistance for assistive devices.

Thus she said, "The major needs can be categorized as accessibility, public education, financial assistance, transportation and employment."

Director Gray concluded her remarks by calling on all agencies that place people with disabilities into employment to try to improve employment opportunities for them in the following ways:

- A. Practitioners like VR counselors need to emulate marketing specialists by becoming more knowledgeable about employer needs.
- B. This group can serve as the catalyst for the development and implementation of conferences that bring employers, practitioners, and workers with disabilities together for mutual information sharing and awareness. This conference is an excellent example, but it cannot be a one-time occurrence.
- C. We need to work together: human services agencies, labor unions, providers, advocates, consumers and employers, to remove any barriers to employment for workers with disabilities.
- D. Networking needs to continue.
- E. Encourage appropriate membership on advisory councils to establish partnerships and other collaborative efforts.
- F. We need to provide technical assistance to employers in the areas of screening, selection, and job identification.
- G. We need to provide adequate follow-up for people we place to address needs and concerns after placement.
- H. We need to be able to address employers' concerns about Workers' Compensation tax credits and other credits available through the Tax Reform Act of 1986.

TONY SUAZO, NATIONAL DISABILITY COORDINATOR
AFL-CIO HUMAN RESOURCES DEVELOPMENT INSTITUTE

Expanding employment opportunities for disabled persons is one of the highest priorities of the AFL-CIO's Human Resources Development Institute, according to Tony Suazo, the Institute's national disability coordinator. He said, "It is imperative that labor unions work with vocational rehabilitation, community and government agencies and employers to help disabled persons prepare for employment. Together, we must develop jobs and training opportunities suited to each person's capability and special needs."

"HRDI is drawing on its close relationships with labor organizations, rehabilitation agencies, and employers, and provides early intervention services to help workers return to their former job or other positions with the same employer. To facilitate their return to work, HRDI staff can assist unions and employers to restructure positions within the plant or company to accommodate disabled workers," Tony continued.

"There are many ways that we can help disabled workers manage their disability. We can provide answers to questions on injury or illness. We can promote an awareness of additional benefits or services to disabled workers and provide information about recovery and return to work," Suazo said.

"We recognize that the key to better jobs for the disabled lies in close working partnerships among organized labor, employers, government and the rehabilitation community. We are actively seeking to forge these partnerships. In cooperation with the President's Committee on the Employment of the Handicapped and state committees representing the disabled, HRDI is committed to becoming more involved in public awareness activities and participation in national, state and local coalitions working on the behalf of the disabled," Suazo concluded.

THE EMPLOYERS' PERSPECTIVE

BLAIR RICKS
MONTANA POWER COMPANY

Blair said the Montana Power Company (MPC) is very serious about its responsibility as an Equal Opportunity Employer. A part of this responsibility is and has been to recruit and employ the disabled.

There are many forces at work which impact the employment of the disabled. The Montana Job Service has been a very positive force in helping identify and refer disabled applications. The single most important thing that has occurred, which has made it possible for MPC to employ the disabled, was the establishment of the Subsequent Injury Fund (SIF).

-- MPC has been able to certify and hire 72 individuals with some for of certifiable disability.

-- It has increased MPC's awareness of establishing realistic physical and mental requirements for jobs.

-- MPC has been able to accurately identify the physical demands for all MPC jobs.

-- They have provided examining physicians with physical requirements for jobs that doctors can use to base their examinations on.

-- The determination as to whether an individual with a disability is able to perform a specific job is left up to someone trained to make those judgment calls, rather than someone who might be influenced by a particular bias.

It is unfortunate that many changes in the way employers conduct business have had to be legislated, but MPC has made those legislated rules and regulations a part of the way they conduct their business. For example, as MPC has hired disabled individuals, they have made reasonable accommodations:

-- For a technician who is confined to a wheelchair, MPC has assigned work that can be performed at a central location, rather than have the employee travel to remote locations. This individual has worked to get MPC to provide other accommodations, such as a special lift, which permits him and others access to the MPC auditorium which is located in the basement.

-- MPC has provided an interpreter for a deaf employee who wants to go through an apprenticeship program.

-- They have made job accommodations for a secretarial employee with migraine headaches.

-- Special accounts have been given to a meter reader with MS.

-- Office equipment has been rearranged for a one-armed employee who handles trouble calls for computer services.

Blair said that MPC has established a targeted selection program which helps employing supervisors make sound employment decisions. Now they make hiring decisions based on demonstrated qualifications rather than "gut feelings".

Blair noted that not only is MPC concerned about the employment of the disabled, they are concerned about their promotional opportunities. They strive to provide disabled employees with the opportunity to be considered for promotional opportunities through internal job postings. Objective criteria has been established for these jobs as well as for entry-level positions.

He stated that MPC's disabled employees are productive individuals who contribute their share and more to the growth and development of MPC.

Blair concluded, "My advice to disabled individuals who are seeking employment is to develop a marketable skill. You are competing with a lot of well qualified individuals for fewer and fewer jobs. You have got to be able to demonstrate that you can do the job as well as or better than nay of the other applicants. You

must be able to prove your worth based on your abilities -- not your disabilities."

DAVID TOLAN, HELENA MANAGER
SAFEWAY STORES, INC.

David spoke about hiring a disabled worker to work in a store he was managing. He said he "was not surprised that it took only a little longer to learn his new job or that he required extra patience. But I was surprised at his eagerness to do a good job, and that he showed up on time every day, and as I learned later he would not call in sick unless he was in the hospital. In short, he was a good, trustworthy employee. The biggest surprise was the customer comments. Our store became the 'store that cared' in Anaconda. The worker was well liked and many people shopped with us because we hired him. The point of the story is not that every disabled worker is the same, but that there are disabled people out there who will make great employees."

He used this story to make recommendations for agencies serving people with disabilities. Tolan's recommendations are: 1. Employers be educated in a one-on-one setting as most employers will not take time out of their busy schedules to go to a meeting. 2. Assign one person to work with an employer. There needs to be a working relationship with a contact that employers can trust to take their interests into account. Tolan concluded by saying, "There are many more employers out there who would become committed to employing the disabled workforce if they knew what I did."

JIM MURRY, EXECUTIVE SECRETARY
MONTANA STATE AFL-CIO

Jim said, "Many of the problems disabled workers face are due to the general problem of the economy and unemployment itself. The problem is that disabled workers are forced to compete for jobs in a labor market characterized by high unemployment, and where job selection criteria emphasizes youth, education and skills.

"A disabled worker's future employment success is closely related to their ability to return to work just as soon as they can, and for the same employer whenever possible. Unions, employers and government should work together to ensure that these workers have the maximum opportunity to do just that.

"We believe that organized labor has an obligation to emphasize and negotiate for broader job security provisions in collective bargaining agreements to meet workers' needs when disability strikes. When a worker is unable to perform their job due to a work-related physical or mental disability --- the employer should be required to make every effort to train their employee for another job, and place them whenever that's possible."

However, Murry said, "In our support for training and rehabilitation programs, we must not lose sight of the fact that without a healthy economy, the problems faced by disabled workers will become more and more difficult. We must all face the

reality that rehabilitation is only a part of the solution to the problems facing disabled workers.

"We are facing a dramatic change in the workforce in Montana and in the nation. We are rapidly shifting away from high-paying jobs in basic industries towards lower-paying service-sector employment. In fact, three-fourths of all the new jobs created in this nation between 1979 and 1985 were in the service sector. Nine out of every ten jobs created between 1984 and 1995 will be in that lower-paying service sector," Murry predicted.

"More workers with good-paying jobs will be forced to give up those jobs for minimum wage employment. More workers and their families will be forced to the welfare lines. There will be more marginal businesses forced to close their doors. And the disabled worker will be faced with the grim reality of an ever-shrinking job market. That's an unfair position to put those workers in and it's unfair to the rest of the American workforce as well," Murry concluded.

SUMMARY OF GENERAL SESSION PRESENTATIONS

The absence of a comprehensive approach to working with people with disabilities was a commonly held theme of presenters at the general session. Most presenters felt that the general state of the economy, which forces disabled workers to compete in an ever shrinking job market was a major problem contributing to the high unemployment rate of disabled workers. Employer education, and the involvement of the disabled community on boards and bureaus dealing with disability issues was stressed by speakers throughout the general session. Advocacy organizations and support groups for disabled individuals is important to their self-determination and self-esteem and was seen as a necessary part of any employment program by several presenters at the general session. And finally, the need for forums that serve as a theater of debate and communication tool dealing with issues faced by the disabled was emphasized as a good first step in dealing with the problems faced by Montana's disabled.

SUMMARY OF PANEL SESSIONS

Panel sessions were held subsequent to the general session. These sessions included speakers from the general session, plus individuals who represented or worked for advocacy organizations, service providers or employers of people with disabilities.

The panel sessions were designed so that participants would have an opportunity to ask questions or make statements about employment issues faced by the disabled. A lack of time prevented the panel sessions being repeated, as was originally scheduled. Consequently, participants at the conference did not have an opportunity to attend more than one panel discussion. (See Summary of Forum and Recommendations for Future Forums.)

An attempt was made to prioritize needs of disabled individuals during the panel sessions. Priorities identified are as follows:

A. Community awareness and education

1. Awareness of the productivity and work habits of the disabled worker would be a necessary first step to employment opportunities for disabled individuals.
2. Greater efforts should be made to utilize public service announcements and speakers' bureaus.
3. Dispelling the myths and biases of disability should be part of the public education curriculum.

B. Inter-agency cooperation

1. A greater need for a network of service providers that interacts on both a local and statewide basis was a common theme among the panels.
2. The panels expressed a need for advocacy organizations representing different constituencies to work with employers of the disabled on an on-going basis.

C. Quality of Life and Accessibility

1. There is a need for accessible public or private transportation in order for individuals with disabilities to participate equally socially and in the workplace.
2. Montana's two independent living centers are totally inadequate to serve the number of eligible individuals. More should be established.
3. There is a lack of information on Social Security benefits as they apply to disabled individuals. It is recommended that an advocacy office be established for this purpose.
4. Job security for workers suffering illness or accident should be a requirement in personnel policies and procedures and collective bargaining agreements.
5. Expanded job opportunities should be more than just quotas and words among employers.

SUMMARY OF EVALUATIONS

All presenters, panelists and participants who attended the forum on disabled employment issues were asked to complete an evaluation form at the conclusion of the conference.

The following represents cumulative responses as tabulated from the evaluation forms:

Question 1: The FORUM was supposed to identify the current status of disabled employment in Montana, identify critical issues, and solicit recommendations for improving disabled employment opportunities. Do you think these purposes were accomplished and to what extent?

88% of the respondents answered in the affirmative, 4% in the negative and 8% did not respond to this question.

Question 2: As a participant did you have the opportunity to express your concerns, identify issues, and make recommendations?

63% of the respondents answered in the affirmative, 19% were negative and 18% did not respond. On this particular question, respondents suggested shorter speeches during the general session, more time needed for interaction and questions and panel session should be longer.

Question 3: Did the FORUM duplicate other conferences or meetings regularly held where disabled employment issues are discussed? If so, which ones?

67% said the conference did not duplicate other conferences or meetings, 21% felt there were other conferences that dealt with some of the same issues and 12% did not respond. Those who felt the conference was duplicative cited workshops conducted by the Montana Developmentally Disabled programs, and conferences sponsored by the Montana Association of Social Workers as examples.

Question 4: Was the selection of speakers and panelists adequate to represent the views of everyone involved in disabled employment? If not, who else should have included?

87% of the respondents felt the speakers and panelists were adequate, 17% of the respondents felt additional expertise would have been beneficial, particularly more employers with an emphasis on employers who had a record of hiring people with disabilities. The feeling was expressed that employers who had hired people with disabilities would be the most effective way to motivate other employers to this end.

Question 5: Would you attend another FORUM if held?

88% of the respondents said, "Yes they would attend another forum", 12% did not respond. Of those stating they would like to attend another forum, the following suggestions were made: The forum should be longer, one to two days. There should be additional breaks scheduled, as many people with disabilities find it difficult to sit for long periods of time. They suggested having tables for the participants as well as the panelists. The panel portion of the forum should be expanded to include a session dealing with "what happens once a person with disabilities re-enters the workforce." Positive responses were that the conference was very informative, had excellent facilities, and issues were explained in depth. Appreciation was expressed to the AFL-CIO Human Resources Development Institute for arranging for travel funds for disabled individuals so they could attend the conference.

Question 6: In the space below please make any suggestions which would improve future FORUMS, make comments on the adequacy of facilities, and/or identify any issues not covered in the Conference you feel are important.

The following are comments taken directly from participants' evaluation sheets:

Two day event; greater detail

More employers

More about mental illness

More/longer panels

Shorten speeches of general session speakers and allow more time for interaction and question/answer period

Would like to see more disabled at the forum

Thank those who helped with information to show disabled what is offered to them

Wants another forum next year

More organization; longer conference; major issue not discussed: once in the workforce how can you prevent early retirement if a disability occurs

More time in panel session; cut time of general sessions to allow more time for discussion; perhaps day long; GranTree was adequate

Allow more breaks; more panel sessions

Clarify mission; change format; speed process

Very informative; excellent facilities; well-explained issues

More time control; panels would be more productive and should be highlighted

Invite more employers; more from employers who hire disabled; you may find these employers more motivated and will in turn motivate other employers

Chairs were hard; tables helpful; choice of tea or juice in afternoon would be appreciated; needs more publicity for future

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE FORUMS

STATEMENT AND CONCLUSION AFL-CIO HUMAN RESOURCES DEVELOPMENT INSTITUTE

The Human Resources Development Institute of the AFL-CIO co-sponsored the conference in its quest to affirm organized labor's strong commitment to establish better access to employment for individuals with disabilities, and to strengthen cooperation with other agencies and rehabilitative service providers.

After reviewing the evaluations and tapes, as well as other material from the conference, it is HRDI's position that a second conference would be appropriate and beneficial. Clearly the participants at the first conference felt a need for this type of a forum. By incorporating the participants suggestions for a second forum it could prove to be even more successful than the first, and hopefully set the course for an annual conference.

STATEMENT AND CONCLUSION GOVERNOR'S COMMITTEE ON EMPLOYMENT OF PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES

The Governor's Committee on Employment of People with Disabilities co-sponsored the 1987 Forum on Disabled Employment Issues to work toward its stated purposes of: 1) providing a forum for the exchange of information, 2) aiding in the identification of problem areas, and 3) targeting these areas for action.

The committee believes the forum overall was a success in that it fulfilled the first two purposes listed above, but fell short in the third purpose, that is, targeting areas for action. The failure to provide recommendations, which was to be a function of interactive panel sessions, occurred through the general session overrunning its original scheduled time. Consequently, not enough time was available for panel sessions to complete their task of identifying critical problem areas and making recommendations for their solution.

Despite the problems in achieving all expected outcomes, the forum was well received by participants. Responses to questions on the value of the forum were that a statewide conference that addresses the employment of people with all types and levels of disabilities should become an annual event. Given this response, the committee will sponsor a 1988 conference building on the lessons learned in sponsoring the 1987 forum.

I. FORMAT

It is obvious from consistent comments on evaluation forms and from other sources that the format of any future conferences should be modified. The following recommendations are a result of an assessment of these comments.

Recommendations:

1. Include information workshops as well as interactive panel sessions.
2. Make the conference a whole day or longer.
3. Have more topical interactive panel sessions which reach consensus on needs and recommendations.
4. Do not have a long general session. Maintain the variety of speakers which made general session presentations, but move the presentations to panel sessions.

II. PARTICIPATION

Since the forum was held immediately after the annual EEO conference, the forum was able to attract a large representation of mostly public employer representatives. These were generally personnel officers or EEO officers who are involved in the hiring decisions of the employers they represented. The forum should try to continue to attract this audience.

The representation of service providers was good. Many of those attending, however, were there because of being invited to participate as presenters.

The representation of disabled persons was only fair. Almost all disabled persons attending were either Montana State AFL-CIO Project Challenge: Work Again participants whose attendance was promoted by HRDI, or were presenters in the general session or in panels.

The representation of private sector employers was inconsequential.

It is obvious that if future forums are to be held and be successful, they must be made more attractive to disabled persons and employers.

Recommendations:

1. Establish direct contact with disabled advocacy organizations and ascertain what would attract their participation in a conference.
2. Establish direct contact with private sector employer groups and ascertain what would attract their participation in a conference. Have key employers committed to disabled employment advertise the forum and get commitments to attend from other employers.